An Inaugural Dissertation

on

Anaesthesia in Labor.

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by

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Anaesthesia in Labor.

Owing to the limited experimental knowledge of students, it is not expected that they will present much that is original in their Theses; but, as in this case, make such deductions from what they have read and heard, as seems applicable to the subject under discussion.

The use of Anaesthetics, as now understood, is of but recent date, although the ancients made use of various narcotic draughts and soporific vapors to render victims of the knife oblivious while undergoing surgical operations.

as applied to labor, Anaesthesia was entirely unknown until Tod. J. Simpson of Edinburgh, (Scotland) on the 19th of January, 1847. had the courage to give ether in a case of difficult labor, with a view of testing its efficacy in such emergencies. The result exceeded his expectations, and led him to continue its administration in labors, both difficult and natural, until he became convinced of the harmlessness of the practice, and enthusiastic in its support and defence.

Before adopting such views or practice, it would be well to consider if the means employed are free from danger or deleterious effects, and not be carried away by the flattering and plausible accounts

of the Edinburgh Professor and his adherents, or by our own inclination to accomplish so desirable an object, as the relief of woman from the sufferings of childbirth, "a consumation devoutly to be wished".

First, then, an enquiry into the effects upon the human organism, of the agents almost exclusively used, is appropriate; also an investigation of their claim to "entire harmlessness". Chloroform and Ether although differing widely in their constituent elements, produce almost precisely the same effects, varying only in the rapidity of their action. The intellectual faculties are the first affected; then, or simultaneously with them, the sensory ganglia; sensation and motion are suspended,

and ultimately, if the quantity inhaled be sufficient, the medulla oblongata has its actions suspended or destroyed, respiration ceases, and death is the result.

Dr. Snow, who has made extensive experiments with anaesthetic drugs, divides their action into five stages as follows;

First. Consists in a kind of exhilaration or inebriation, consciousness to surrounding objects remaining unimpaired, although sensibility to pain is somewhat blunted.

Second. The mind becomes more affected; the mental functions are considerably impaired, and the patient lies in a dreamy state, almost unconscious. Sometimes,

however, the opposite of this is true, and the patient is very difficult to manage.

Third. There exists a state of paralysis, and the muscles of the extremities are spasmodically contracted; the eyes are drawn upwards, the conjunctiva congested and the mental faculties entirely suspended

Fourth. There is complete relaxation of the voluntary muscles and entire insensibility to pain, no matter what extent of injury may be inflicted; The breathing being attended with difficulty and stertor.

Fifth and last stage. "Is the commencement of dying". The breathing now is very difficult;

the respiration, labored, irregular and slow, In all instabability, the breathing is "synchronous with the pulse". (a sign of approaching death obsrerved by Profs Hering and Rane) Finally, respiration ceases, but the heart struggles on for a moment longer as though unwilling to give up the contest for life.

In experimenting upon myself with Ether and Nitrous oxide, I observed that sensibility to pain became blunted and even lost, while consciousness was but little affected.

The cumulative property of Anaesthetics, or the fact of their effects increasing after the administration has been discontinued, is a peculiarity which adds much to the danger of their employment. Dr Snow

says, the absorption, into the blood, continues for about twenty minutes after the intermission of their inhalation. I believe this absorption continues for a much longer period, although the effects may not be so apparent, or at least not be attributed to the agent used. In my case, having inhaled at one time 4 ozs of Ether, which produced considerable nausea and vomiting, different persons detected it on my breath three and even four days after its inhalation.

Keeping this dangerous peculiarity in view, it is not difficult to comprehend, how easy it would be to pass the imaginary boundry of the fourth stage, to that "fatal hypnedpia" called the "fifth stage", the "commence-

ment of dying".

Admitting that the great majority of cases escape any apparent ill consequences, is it justifiable to take the life of one in a thousand, that the rest may have immunity from physiological pain.

The surgeon stands in an entirely different light, and makes use of these means in his endeavors to save life. It would be well to remember the old maxim, "that to employ dangerous remedies for non-dangerous diseases, is at variance with the principles of our art." Further; some experimenters have found that the blood, in a profound state of anaesthesia, "became as black as ink." This, probably, is owing to the lack of oxygenation.

Murphy (on Chloroform) states that "the
vapour of Chloroform is fatal,
and if too concentrated a dose be
inhaled, the excess of free Chloroform
may be so great as to at once paral-
yze the heart". It is evident that
the hearts action is impeded, as may
be inferred not only from the pulse,
but, in the case of amputations or
other section of the blood vessels, from
the diminished flow of blood from
their orifices.

An increased liability to
hemorrhage has also been attribu-
ted to the use of Anaesthetics. Caz-
eaux says he "believes they have not,
in some cases at least, been altogeth-
er without influence in the produc-
tion of subsequent inertia and hem-
orrhage", and Montgomery declares

this to be so, as his personal experiance. This seems reasonable, from the fact that should the uterus not contract promptly, the orifices of the vessels in consequence remaining more or less patulous, hemorrhage would be the result.

"We cannot purchase immunity from suffering without incurring a certain degree of danger," and we cannot close our eyes upon the fact that fatal results have followed the use of Anaesthetic vapors. "Montgomery says, in certain surgical operations death has resulted immediately upon the administration of Chloroform; is not the supposition both probable and reasonable, that a similar misfortune might happen to a woman in labor?"

Unquestionably, under such circumstances, she would be much more susceptible to deleterious influences, than when in the ordinary condition.

Bazeaux, also, remarks; "Whilst regarding the use of Chloroform as devoid of danger in the majority of cases, we cannot entirely forget the misfortunes of certain surgeons, who had, nevertheless, taken the best precautions to avoid them".

From the above, then, it will be seen, that these "sleep inducing" vapours, are not the harmless agents their advocates would make them out to be; although apparently so in the vast majority of cases.

The adherents of this practice claim, that the mental sufferings, dread, &c, together with the

intensity of the pain endured, has a more deleterious influence than the Anaesthetic.

In the first place, if the woman is in a normal, healthy, condition, she will have no such "mental sufferings, dread &c" as is depicted; but if not, the proper homoeopathic remedy will accomplish all that is desired. Secondly the intensity of suffering in natural labors is not so great as they would lead us to suppose; and in the performance of this function woman is endowed by her Creator with fortitude sufficient for the occasion, and requires no such assistance to enable her to endure the necessary suffering, which would at the same time "deaden

the imagination already teaming with the joys of maternity".

Cazeaux says; "the more I reflect upon it the more determined do I feel, to exclude Anaesthetics from simple labors entirely". Taking this able Obstetrician as the representative of the largest portion of those who advocate this practice, we will observe in what conditions he recommends it, and then see if Homoeopathics require such aid, or are justifiable in its employment.

"It may be especially useful," remarks the above; "1st In calming the extreme agitation and mental excitement which labor often produces in very nervous women. 2nd In those cases in which labor

appears to be suspended or much
retarded by the pain occasioned
by previous disease, or such as
may intervene during labor (vom-
iting, Cramps, Colic, Compression
of the Sciatic nerve &c). 3rd It seems
particularly indicated by those
irregular or partial contractions
which, notwithstanding the intense
and almost constant pain which
they occasion, have no effect to
advance the labor. 4th Spasmo-
dic contractions and rigidity
of the Cervix Uteri. 5th Eclampsia."

What true follower of
Hahnemann would ask a better
opportunity to demonstrate the
truth of our principles, and
the entire inappropriateness of
Anaesthesia, than is here presented:

If not necessary in such cases, when is it applicable? Surely not in Natural Labors, nor can it be in instrumental, for in that case it is necessary that the patient has her full conciousness, that she may guide the Accoucheur and prevent injury to her parts.

In the Caesarean section the use of Anaesthesia is proper, (as in any other great surgical operation), thereby saving the patient suffering and rendering her more managable.

Advocates of this practice claim Lastly, that while conciousness to pain is abrogated, the uterine and abdominal contractions are not diminished, and the perineum and other parts become relaxed.

Notwithstanding this assertion, many
authors (Murphy, Bovier, Montgomery and
others) have found the strength
and endurance of the labor pains
materially interfered with, and
sometimes completely suspended.
And Cazeaux has raised a doubt
whether the abdominal muscles
act in conjunction with the uterus
at all; but thinks that what
has been mistaken for abdom-
inal contractions, is caused
by the difficult breathing. This
view is also supported by Channing.
As to the increased laxity of
the perineum he remarks, like
Messrs Dubois, Chailly and others,
I have sometimes known the
perineum to yield and distend with
great facility; though more com-

monly, even when the Anaesthesia was complete, it remained as resistent as ever.

In conclusion I contend, that even should the "old school" with their meager resources, be justified in making use of Anaesthetics, the homoepathists, with the great law of the "similars" for their guide and the potentized medicine at their command, should never be guilty of making use of such dangerous and unnecessary means to overcome irregularities in the performance of a Physiological Function; and it is but reasonable to prophecy, that when mankind shall have been under

the benign influence of our
system for a few generations
these "irregularities" will be-
come less and less frequent,
and the process of parturi-
tion more purely physiol-
ogical, and as a consequence
the sufferings of childbirth
so much mitigated as to require
no such intervention of Art
as "Anaesthesia in Labor".

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